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Sauces yield restaurant-quality meals

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No matter if it's sauteed, baked, broiled or grilled, chicken can get boring.

So how do you keep your dinner from having a case of the blahs? Maybe you just need to dress it up a bit.

That's where Kevin Fortun comes in. The 55-year-old Seattle native — who sold his Stockpot Soups line to Campbell's in 1998 — has created a new line of signature sauces available here in the Coachella Valley.

"I had always wanted to do sauces," said Fortun, sitting in the courtyard patio of Desert Sage, the restaurant he owns in La Quinta. "We were talking about sauces when I sold Stockpot, and I kept that idea for myself."

The idea behind the sauces, which are used in several dishes created by Chef Keith Otter at Desert Sage, "was to turn casual home cooking into something you could get at a restaurant, but without having to use all the ingredients in the house," said Fortun.

Consistency, he said, is the key: "To make sure that every sauce tastes the same every time, every ingredient has to be measured to the microgram."

The secret to locking in the quality of the preservative-free sauces is in the flash-cooling process, Fortun said. As soon as the sauces come off the stove (so to speak), they are bagged, sealed and quick-cooled to stop the cooking process and ensure freshness.

"They'll last 150 days in your refrigerator," he said. "And a year if you freeze them when you get home."

A dozen varieties of Fortun's Finishing Touch Sauces were introduced in 2009, and are available locally at Costco, Jensen's Finest Foods and Bristol Farms.

To demonstrate how good the sauces are, Desert Sage offers a prix fixe menu with a choice of Alaskan King Salmon with Santa Fe Verde sauce and White Bean Ragout; Lamb Osso Bucco with Spicy Mustard Brandy sauce and Egg Rigatoni; and Center Cut Pork Chop with Four Peppercorn sauce and Three Cheese Polenta.

"I'm a classically trained (at the California Culinary Institute in San Francisco) chef," Otter said. "I wouldn't use these in my kitchen if they weren't perfect."

Mediterranean Fettuccine

(Serves 4.)

8 ounces Fortun Finishing Touch Mediterranean sauce

1/2 pound fettuccine

1 large pot of salted boiling water

Parmesan cheese, to taste

2 tablespoons Italian parsley, freshly chopped

Place large stock pot of water on stove and bring to a rapid boil. Season water with salt. Follow directions for cooking fettuccine, "al dente" texture is preferred.

Place Mediterranean sauce in a pan to heat, bring to a quick simmer (do not boil). Heat sauce just prior to pasta being ready. Once fettuccine is ready drain well, place in large bowl, add sauce, mix well. Divide the pasta equally among four plates. Garnish liberally with grated Parmesan cheese and fresh-chopped Italian parsley. Serve immediately.



Part-time La Quinta resident Kevin Fortun and his wife, Sandi, are shown with varieties of Fortun's Finishing Touch sauces at their restaurant, Desert Sage, in La Quinta. Fortun launched the line in 2009 and are available locally at Costco, Jensen's Finest Foods, Bristol Farms and selected Ralphs Fresh Fare. (Photos by Crystal Chatham The Desert Sun)



Fortun's Finishing Touch sauces include Mulligatawny Curry (bottom left), Marsala and Mushroom (top), and Lemon Dill Caper with White Wine (right).



The Alaskan King Salmon dish on the prix fixe menu at Desert Sage in La Quinta features roasted vegetables, White Bean Ragout and Fortun's Finishing Touch Santa Fe Verde sauce.

GET SAUCY

Fortun Finishing Touch sauces come in a dozen varieties for meat, fish and vegetables, including:

Santa Fe Verde, made with tomatillos, chilies and fire-roasted peppers.

Ragun Cajun, made with Tabasco sauce and okra.

BBQ (Picnic in a Pan), made with summer veggies, black beans and hickory smoke.

Mediterranean, made with four kinds of olives and anchovy paste.

Spicy Mustard with Brandy, creamy sauce with brandy.

Marsala and Mushroom, a traditional Sicilian sauce.

Lemon Dill Caper with White Wine, zesty, good for fish or chicken.

Asian Style Pepper, made with sake.

Four Pepper, made with Burgundy and Madeira wine,

Spanish Romesco with Saffron, made with chilies, peppers, olives and saffron.

Mulligatawny Curry, made with golden raisins, apples and brandy.

Stroganoff, made with Dijon mustard and sour cream.

Where to find them

Fortun Finishing Touch sauces cost \$4.95-\$5.95, but prices may vary. You'll find them at the following stores:

Costco, 72800 Dinah Shore Drive, Palm Desert, (760) 318-4136; 79795 Highway 111, La Quinta, (760) 775-0370.

Bristol Farms, 73101 Country Club Drive, (760) 674-0169.

Jensen's Finest Foods, 2465 E. Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, (760) 325-8282; 73601 Highway 111, Palm Desert, (760) 346-9393.

Selected Ralphs Fresh Fare stores valleywide

Desert Sage Restaurant Piano Bar

Where: 78085 Avenida La Fonda, La Quinta

Hours: 4 to 10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; open until 11 p.m. Friday-Saturday.

Prix fixe dinner: 4 to 6 p.m. nightly, \$29.95 or \$38.95 after 6 p.m. Includes choice of entrée made with Fortun's Finishing Touch sauce.

Beverage, tax and gratuity not included.

Information: (760) 564-8744; desertsagerestaurant.net.